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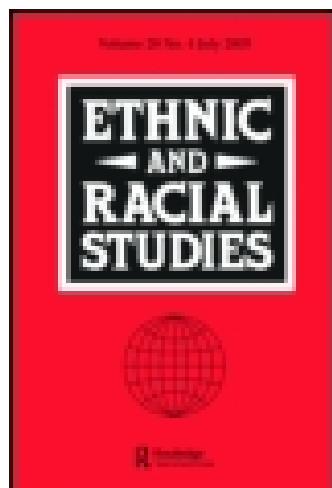
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Class, race and ethnicity: a critique of Cox's theory

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Oliver Cromwell Cox's text, *Caste, Class and Race*, was first published in 1948 and, thirty years later, is still regarded as the classic Marxist analysis of race relations¹. My aim here is to argue that this attribution of Marxist status is, ultimately, ill-advised (an argument which is given additional support by his posthumously published work (1976)) and in the process of so doing, to argue that Cox's 'great work' is logically flawed in a fundamental manner. Additionally, as Banton has observed (Banton, 1977: 10), there is little or no critical literature on the classic 'race relations' texts, and so this critique has the supplementary aims of perhaps stimulating such a literature and, thereby, outlining the basic elements of a Marxist account of the relationship between class and 'race' (or rather, as I shall suggest later, between class and racial categorization).

Cox would not have denied that he was writing 'under the influence' of Marx (although as I shall point out, it was under the influence of only a very limited selection of Marx's writings), but he was also concerned to produce a consistent sociological theory of what we saw as 'race relations' on a global scale. Hence, Cox had two main theses to establish. First, he maintains that race relations cannot be reduced to caste relations: thus, a large part of *Caste, Class and Race* was conceived as a 'frontal assault' on the work of W. Lloyd Warner and John Dollard, amongst others. Second, he argues that 'race prejudice' is not a natural or inevitable phenomenon but a feature of the development of capitalism, with the consequence that a solution to the 'race problem' is dependent upon a transition from capitalism to a democratic, classless society. In so arguing, he was obliged to consider the nature of the relationship between class and 'race'.

While Cox's first thesis is not currently contentious (although some writers do imply that the concept of caste still has some relevance in Western capitalism e.g. Burawoy, 1975–6: 1075), his second is and the focus of my critique will be on Cox's solution to the 'class/race problematic'. I am not concerned here, therefore, with the validity of Cox's assertion that 'race

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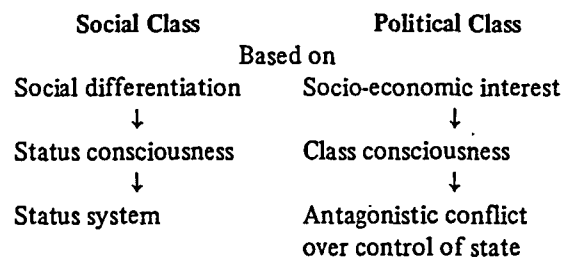
prejudice' is a product of capitalism (for a critique of this, see Gabriel and Ben-Tovim, 1978), but with the adequacy of Cox's solution to this other basic theoretical problem.

Social class and political class

Cox asserts that there is an important analytical distinction between social class and political class (see Diagram 1). The concept of social class acknowledges that the population of a capitalist society can be stratified on a range of social criteria and that the resulting social classes constitute a dynamic system, the motor of which is the ideology of individualism. Hence, modern capitalist societies are fluid in social class terms: there is 'a constant milling of social status atoms — that is to say, a circulation of individuals or families as bearers of status' (Cox, 1970: 149). And, as bearers of status, individuals have the potential of becoming status-conscious.

This social class system is distinct from political class in that the latter refers to a 'power group which tends to be organized for conflict' (Cox, 1970: 138; 154). Cox indentifies two political classes in contemporary capitalism, the ruling class (composed mainly of businessmen) and the working class which exists by virtue of the 'commoditization' of the capacity to labour (Cox, 1970: 177; 180). These two political classes, motivated by different socio-economic interests, are in conflict over the control of the state and the continuing existence of capitalism. However, argues Cox, common socio-economic interests are not necessarily consciously recognized and a political class can only be actively involved in class struggle when it has developed a consciousness of its class position (Cox, 1970: 157; 162). When the two political classes are so conscious, the conflict that follows usually takes a violent form (Cox, 1970: 163 *passim*), although in certain circumstances, the conquest of power by the working class can be achieved without 'extirpating' the dominant political class (Cox, 1970: 165; 169).

Diagram 1



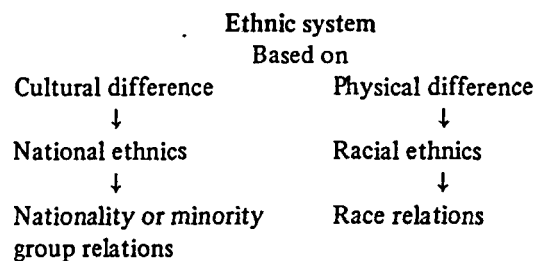
Although political classes are not always class conscious, Cox argues that they must inevitably become so because of the very operation of the capitalist mode of production. He argues that the nature of the business-cycle, producing unemployment, stimulates proletarian discontent which is then fuelled by an increase in its power and its recognition for the need for planning. The class struggle is therefore inherent in the nature of capitalist production and

hence capitalism 'because of its inevitable dialectical development, its internal contradictions, is unstable and will sooner or later resolve itself into a more permanent system' (Cox, 1970: 188).

Nationality and race relations

Cox believes that societies are not only stratified in terms of social and political class but also contain 'distinct peoples'. He defines what he calls 'an ethnic' as 'a people living competitively in relationship of superordination or subordination with respect to some other people or peoples within one state, country or economic area' (Cox, 1970: 317), and hence Cox's notion of ethnic system. Cox argues that there are two types of ethnic system (see Diagram 2), one based on cultural differentiation, the other on physical differentiation (that is 'race', or mixed blood). Thus, when ethnics perceive their differences to be cultural, Cox argues that the resulting social relations be identified as *nationality* or *minority group relations*, while when they are perceived to be physical, they are to be identified as *race relations*. Thus, race relations are defined as 'that behaviour which develops among peoples who are aware of each others' actual or imputed physical differences' or, more precisely, 'only those contacts the social characteristics of which are determined by a consciousness of "racial" difference' (Cox, 1970: 320). We should note that Cox specifically rejects a biological concept of race, believing that races are social constructions: he defines a race as 'any group of people that is generally believed to be, and generally accepted as, a race in any given area of ethnic competition' (Cox, 1970: 319).

Diagram 2



Cox argues that there is a direct causal relationship between race relations and the development of capitalism:

... racial exploitation and race prejudice developed among Europeans with the rise of capitalism and nationalism, and that because of the world-wide ramifications of capitalism, all racial antagonisms can be traced to the policies and attitudes of the leading capitalist people, the white people of Europe and North America (Cox, 1970: 322).

He surveys the history of European expansion and conquest prior to the emergence of capitalism and argues that, due to the predominance of a religious world-view, the ideological expression of the conflict that the

expansion induced focused upon a 'Jew-heathen-infidel antagonistic complex' (Cox, 1970: 326). The dominant influence of Roman Catholicism began to be undermined with the development of the slave trade in the West Indies, for there was a need to explain and justify this extreme form of 'commercialization of labour'. The rush to exploit the resources of the New World and the introduction of slavery in the South of the USA also required justification but argues Cox, it was not until the colonial expansion by the European powers in the latter half of the nineteenth century that they 'began to justify their economic designs upon weaker European peoples with subtle theories of racial superiority and masterhood' (Cox, 1970: 330). Race relations situations are therefore the product, indeed the necessary product, of the emergence and development of capitalism: they are necessary because the economic exploitation by capitalists of a different 'race' has to be justified. Hence, Cox defines race prejudice as constituting

... an attitudinal justification necessary for an easy exploitation of some race. To put it still another way, race prejudice is the social-attitudinal concomitant of the racial-exploitative practice of a ruling class in a capitalistic society (Cox, 1970: 470).

The specificity of race relations

Cox stresses the historical and social specificity of race relations when distinguishing them from *intolerance*, *ethnocentrism* and *racism*. He defines intolerance as

... an unwillingness on the part of a dominant group to tolerate the beliefs or practices of a subordinate group because it considers these beliefs and practices to be either inimical to group solidarity or a threat to the continuity of the status quo (Cox, 1970: 393).

Having defined race prejudice as a 'socio-attitudinal matrix' consciously propagated by the ruling class with the aim of justifying the exploitation of a race, Cox maintains that intolerance is therefore conceptually distinct which, given that he uses the Jews as an example of a group which is the object of intolerance, thereby allows him to argue that anti-semitism is distinct from race prejudice. The distinction is developed further by arguing that intolerance and race prejudice have distinct behavioural forms, persecution and exploitation respectively, and that an intolerant group requires the 'out-group' to assimilate while a race-prejudiced group is antagonized by the very same intention. He also maintains that intolerance is an inherent and inevitable phenomenon in any society (Cox, 1970: 398) while race prejudice, as has already been shown, is historically specific.

Ethnocentrism (the 'we-feeling' found in all social groups) is, too, argues Cox, an inherent feature of social organization. He maintains that ethnocentrism need not be antagonistic but can simply be a recognition of the difference of others. It follows that a group which has developed a consciousness of its 'race' may exhibit ethnocentrism but this is a function of its

solidarity rather than the focus of its group consciousness (Cox, 1970: 321; 477–9).

In contrast, Cox's objection to the concept of racism is not that it refers to an inevitable feature of social organization but because it inevitably leads to a peculiar and, in his view, limited form of analysis. He argues that racism is usually used to refer to sets of ideas and opinions, an ideology, and studies of racism abstract these ideas from their social context, the result being 'the substitution of the history of a system of rationalization for that of a material social fact' (Cox, 1970: 321; See also 482).²

Capitalism, class structure and race relations

Cox's main theses can therefore be summarised as follows:

- (a) Contemporary capitalist societies have a social class system and, additionally, exhibit a basic political class conflict between the ruling class and the working class, a conflict which is the motor of social and economic revolution.
- (b) Contemporary capitalist societies include ethnic systems and may therefore contain nationality/minority group relations and/or race relations.
- (c) Race relations are historically specific to capitalist societies and, in turn, should be distinguished from both intolerance and ethnocentrism.

I first want to argue that Cox has not adequately theorized the relationship between the first and second of these theses (and thereby refuses to grasp the nettle of 'race prejudice' amongst the working class) and, second, to show that his dichotomous typology of ethnic systems is inadequate.

Cox argues that both national and racial ethnics are power groups: that is to say, they are both potential or actual antagonists, depending upon the degree of culture or race prejudice respectively. He does not indicate how intense these prejudices have to be, nor the nature of the historical and social context, for the conflict to become manifest. Nevertheless, in identifying national and racial ethnics as *power groups*, Cox is arguing that they share this characteristic with political classes (but not with social classes). Thus, political classes, national ethnics and racial ethnics are the same order of phenomena in that they are all potential or actual antagonistic power groups. The problem is then to articulate the relationship between national conflict, race conflict and political class conflict.

Cox's initial formulation is that not only can political class action within a society split ethnic groups, the conflict following lines of economic cleavage within the 'race' or national groups, but also that national or 'race' antagonism can bring together classes which would otherwise be in conflict, illustrating the latter by reference to South Africa and the Southern States of America (Cox, 1970: 319). In other words, both political class conflict and ethnic (both national and 'race') conflict have a separate but equivalent reality, such that class can cross-cut ethnic affiliation and ethnic affiliation can bring together otherwise antagonistic classes.

Later in the text, Cox asserts that '...racial antagonism is essentially

political class conflict' (Cox, 1970: 333) because racial exploitation is said to be only a specific form of the proletarianization and exploitation of labour. This assertion is in conflict with that just discussed in so far as racial conflict is reduced to class conflict, whereas he has previously suggested that these are two distinct phenomena. Cox argues that the capitalist utilizes race prejudice for the opportunistic reason of ensuring that workers of another 'race' remain exploitable and that the burden of exploitation is probably no greater than that experienced by the white worker during the early stages of capitalism. Later Cox also argues that, with one limitation, 'race relations and the struggle of the white proletariat are parts of a single social phenomenon', the limitation being that in the case of race relations, the bourgeoisie aims to proletarianize a whole people, whereas in the case of political class relations, it aims to proletarianize only a section of the people of the same 'race' (Cox, 1970: 344).

Three observations are in order here. First, the argument that the white proletariat of early capitalism experienced exploitation to much the same degree as black workers in the USA in the 1940s utilizes a sociological and not a Marxist concept of exploitation: the latter concept necessitates discussion of the extraction of surplus value, a notion which is absent from Cox's work as a whole.

Second, one cannot accept Cox's argument that, in terms of the operation of capitalism, the identification of blacks as an inferior 'race' is necessarily a particular form of 'the proletarianization of labour' (Cox, 1970: 333). If the origin of the alleged biological inferiority of blacks is traced as far back as the introduction of slavery into the southern states of the USA then we must question the position that this institution constitutes a form of the proletarianization of labour. In the context of a Marxist theory, slavery did not proletarianize the blacks but simply made them slaves. Under the institution of slavery, blacks do not constitute a proletariat because they do not freely sell their labour power as a commodity for a wage: they are possessed as objects by the plantation owners for the purpose of labouring.

Third, to use Cox's terms, it may be that, following the abolition of slavery, 'racial exploitation' is only a particular form of 'the proletarianization of labour', but it does not logically follow that the resulting racial antagonism is reducible to or synonymous with, 'political-class' conflict. The racial categorization and consequent subordination of the black workers may ensure a rate of extraction of surplus value in excess of that obtained from the white worker and, moreover, such an identification can lead to the creation of what Cox elsewhere terms a collective consciousness of 'race' which cuts across and obstructs 'political class' consciousness. In other words, although black workers in capitalist society are proletarianized, they are additionally 'racialized', with the result that, in Cox's terms, they constitute a distinct power group and can motivate themselves politically on that basis.

These problems all flow from Cox's failure to clearly articulate a theoretical relationship between political class and ethnic systems (or, in my terms, between the capitalist class structure and racial categories). As has been shown, he begins by identifying those concepts which are necessary to under-

stand class structure and then, in analytical isolation, introduces the concept of ethnic system. The consequence is that the concepts of political class and ethnic system are not systematically related to each other theoretically. It is the absence of such theorization that leads Cox to claim, on the one hand, that it is as equally possible for political class action to obstruct ethnic group solidarity as it is for ethnic group solidarity to obstruct political class solidarity (that is, Cox attributes political class and ethnic relations with the same status as 'antagonistic regimes': see Cox, 1970: 318–19) while on the other hand to argue that racial conflict (a sub-type of ethnic conflict) is, in effect, political-class conflict.

Yet (and this compounds the problem) Cox elsewhere attributes primacy to the political class struggle in the process of revolutionary change and asserts the inevitability of the transition to socialism. While one cannot logically interpret this to mean that political class conflict always and necessarily has precedence over racial conflict, it does imply that political class conflict is a different order of phenomenon from that of racial conflict. This is most evident in Cox's 1948 prognosis of the 'race problem' in the United States, a prognosis about which Banton has correctly commented that time has not dealt kindly (Banton, 1977: 134). Cox's argument is that the origin of racial conflict in the United States lay in the conflict between the desire of American blacks to 'assimilate', a desire which they shared with all American immigrants, and the desire of 'racially articulate, nationalistic whites that they should not' (Cox, 1970: 545). However, Cox maintains that under more advanced capitalism in the northern states, factory organization has ensured the advance of working class organization, an advance which is equated with the advance of democracy: 'To the extent that democracy is achieved, to that extent also the power of the ruling class to exploit through racial prejudice is limited' (Cox, 1970: 540).

This implies that advanced capitalism is inherently politically progressive in the sense that race prejudice will necessarily decline because of the development of democracy. Moreover, Cox argues that American blacks would not produce a great leader because this would imply collective organization and solidarity, a phenomenon which he believed would obstruct their assimilation if whites were not to be antagonized (Cox, 1970: 572–73). The correct strategy for blacks, he therefore maintains, is to follow the leadership of 'fellow convinced whites' when they eventually overthrow the present dominant class: 'The problem of racial exploitation, then, will most probably be settled as part of the world proletarian struggle for democracy; every advance of the masses will be an actual or potential advance for the coloured people' (Cox, 1970: 582–83).

There is an obvious internal logic to this argument: because of the primacy and inevitability of political class struggle, the American black working class is *destined* to political inactivity, except at the behest of the 'fellow convinced whites', and any attempt to act in a way which contradicts this destiny (e.g. by collective organization under a black working class leadership) will be counter-productive. The implication is, then, that political class

conflict pre-empts or structures conflict arising from the ethnic system. Events since 1948 have not been consistent with this formulation and analysis: to date, the position of the dominant capitalist class has not been successfully challenged by the working class although there has been a process of collective organization on the part of the American black working class. The precise relationship between these two 'events' is arguable, but their coincidence does suggest that the relationship between, in Cox's terms, the political class system and the ethnic system requires more precise theoretical articulation. This, in turn, requires grasping the nettle of 'race prejudice' amongst the working class.

Capitalism, the working class and 'race prejudice'

As has been previously indicated, Cox attributes the development of race prejudice to the efforts of white capitalists to ensure the successful exploitation of the labour of a population which was physically distinct. However, an argument about origins or *production* of race prejudice should be considered to be analytically distinct from an argument about its *reproduction*. More specifically, an explanation of the origin of race prejudice does not necessarily explain the nature and extent of contemporary race prejudice. This is implicitly accepted by Cox when he comments, in a footnote, that he does not wish to imply that race prejudice is continually being newly and consciously produced:

Race prejudice, from its inception, becomes part of the social heritage, and as such both exploiters and exploited for the most part are born heirs to it. It is possible that most of those who propagate and defend race prejudice are not conscious of its fundamental motivation (Cox, 1970: 333).

That is to say, once the 'socio-attitudinal matrix' of race prejudice has been formulated by the capitalist class, it becomes an element in the national culture and succeeding generations come to internalize this 'matrix', or at least elements of it, through their socialization: race prejudice can therefore be culturally reproduced by the usual means of cultural transmission, without or indeed contrary to, the active 'support' of the dominant class.

But, if race prejudice is an element of a national culture, then not only can it, at least partially, take on a life of its own (in the sense that it can be reproduced without the intervention of those who initially formulated it) but in the absence of an explanation as to why this would not be so, one must assume that race prejudice will therefore be found within the working class. Thus, although race prejudice *may* have been a creation of the dominant class it can be reproduced within the working class without the working class consciously accepting or supporting dominant class motivations for the initial production of race prejudice. Nevertheless, Cox's emphasis remains very much upon the role of the contemporary white capitalist in re-producing race prejudice (e.g. Cox, 1970: 393; 475), rather than upon its internalization and reproduction by the working class, although at one point he does state

that it is propagated amongst 'the public' (Cox, 1970: 393). Cox's analysis, therefore, does not specifically allow for the expression of race prejudice amongst the working class.

The only point at which this issue is in any way considered is in relation to the anti-Asian movement in California at the turn of the nineteenth century, a movement in which the American labour movement was heavily involved. Cox initially describes the situation in California after the arrival of Japanese and Chinese workers and the expression of working class opposition as 'racial' (Cox, 1970: 410), yet on the following page rejects the view that the opposition was a 'racial' phenomenon. Cox's argument is based upon an analogy with the machine-smashing phenomenon of early capitalism: the white worker is said to be responding to the employer's attempt to reduce the cost of labour by importing cheaper Asiatic labour. Because the worker is therefore opposing the interests of his employer, Cox argues that this is another aspect of political-class struggle (Cox, 1970: 411–13). A few pages further on, he then claims that 'race relations on the coast are internationality relations' and that the conflict between white and Japanese worker is only an exhibition of intolerance (pp. 420–21). The reader is left bewildered as to how Cox is analyzing this empirical case.

However, according to Cox's own definition that a situation is racial when the groups in question recognize each other on the basis of physical criteria, it must follow from the nature of the response of American labour to the migration of Japanese and Chinese workers that the situation be described as racial. For example, the President of the American Federation of Labour, Samuel Gompers, co-authored a pamphlet which called for the exclusion of the inferior Asians, claiming amongst other things that the racial differences between American whites and Asians would never be overcome and that the Chinese were congenitally immoral (Hill, 1967: 390) while one of the founders of the Socialist Party demanded that USA and Canada should remain 'white man's' countries (one wonders how he viewed the presence of blacks in the USA!); in addition a 'Marxist' theoretician of the time expressed the view that 'I am determined that my race shall be supreme in this country and in the world' (Peterson, 1971: 34). Thus, the response of at least a proportion of the labour movement to the Chinese and Japanese was an expression of, in Cox's terms, race prejudice.

In this connection, it is significant that Cox ignores completely the 'race-prejudice' of the white manual worker in the USA towards the black worker. This has been particularly evident in the craft unions which have not only adopted an exclusive organizational policy with regard to white workers in semi- and unskilled work, but also towards black workers who were generally regarded as being inherently unsuitable for skilled machine work. Thus, in 1926, eleven of the unions affiliated to the American Federation of Labour and a further thirteen unaffiliated unions had written rules which limited membership to whites. And even where there were no written regulations excluding black workers, a large number of unions excluded them by tacit agreement, or, if they did admit them to membership, excluded them from

certain rights or benefits of membership. This process of complete exclusion and second-class treatment was a key factor in stimulating the formation of independent black trade unions in the USA in the 1920s (Spero and Harris, 1968: 53–86; 116–27) and limiting black workers to certain sectors of the labour market (Hill, 1967: 392).

The point is, therefore, that Cox either plays down or fails to confront that evidence which suggests that race prejudice has been forcefully articulated by the white working class in the USA. Given Cox's argument about the 'social heritage', such empirical facts could perhaps be accommodated within the explanatory framework he provides, although his evident uncertainty about how to conceptualize the nature of opposition to Asian labour implies a reluctance to accept the fact that race prejudice could be articulated within the white working class.

This reluctance is relevant to the previously identified contradiction in his theoretical analysis between, on the one hand, the assertion of the primacy of political class and, on the other, the assertion of an equivalence between class and ethnic systems. Cox 'solves' the contradiction by pursuing an empirical analysis and prognosis for the future of race relations in the USA that is in line with the former assertion. Hence, it follows from the primacy of the class structure that the increasing collective organization of the working class constitutes the only effective challenge to the dominant ruling class. Given that race prejudice is a product of that dominant class, then as the organized working class achieves positions of greater strength (Cox's reference to the spread of democracy is relevant here), race prejudice declines, the implication being that when the battle for control of the state is over, race prejudice will have been eliminated. This analysis is fundamentally challenged by evidence that working class race prejudice is a significant 'material force' in American society. An explanation for working class race prejudice, given the historical evidence, is therefore a central analytical problem, but in turn, it must be preceded by an analysis of the relationship between capitalism, class structure and racial categorization. I have suggested that Cox's analysis of this relationship is inadequate and contradictory because the relationship between class structure and the social category of 'race' is insufficiently theorized. This limitation is compounded by further theoretical problems associated with his analysis of ethnic systems.

On ethnic systems

Cox's notion of ethnic system is a theoretical attempt to recognize the empirical reality of the social attribution of significance to both cultural and physical differences in given populations within capitalist societies. The dichotomous typology of ethnic systems is problematic for three reasons.

First, Cox's analysis almost imperceptibly shifts from a focus on race relations (as one instance of an ethnic system) to a focus on race prejudice. Having discussed the nature of ethnic systems, Cox proceeds to eliminate 'certain concepts that are commonly confused with that of race relations.

These are: ethnocentrism, intolerance, and “racism” (Cox, 1970: 321). Although this is attempted in summary form (the theme is taken up at greater length later) Cox, having intended to distinguish between ‘intolerance’ and ‘race relations’, in fact draws a distinction between ‘intolerance’ and ‘racial antagonism’. Thereafter, his analysis focuses upon racial antagonism or, for Cox, its synonym, race prejudice. Thus, on the same page, Cox writes: ‘Again, one should miss the point entirely if one were to think of *racial antagonism* as having its genesis in some ‘social instinct’ or antipathy between peoples (1970: 321–322, my emphasis).

The ‘slip’ from a concept of race relations to one of racial antagonism (or race prejudice) is not without theoretical consequences for it carries with it the implication that race relations, that is, ‘that behaviour which develops among peoples who are aware of each other’s actual or imputed physical differences’ (1970: 320), only exist in the context of the expression of racial antagonism/race prejudice. This is made explicit in Cox’s typology of situations of race relations, that is, situations ‘in which the aggressive whites have sought most conveniently and efficiently to exploit the human and natural resources of the colored peoples’ (1970: 353). The implication of this assertion is not only that race relations situations are, by definition, situations of racial antagonism/race prejudice, but also that the race prejudice is expressed by whites against ‘colored peoples’; that is to say, only white ‘racial antagonism’ brings about race relations situations.

This formulation suggests that social behaviour which is structured by the recognition and attribution of significance to physical differences can only be classified as a race relations situation when there is an expression of race prejudice, excluding those situations in which social behaviour is not structured by the recognition and attribution of biological inferiority or in which there is a positive value placed on certain physical features (as in the case of ‘positive discrimination’) from being defined as race relations situations. These latter situations would count as ‘race relations’ if there was no ‘slippage’ from the concept of race relations to that of racial antagonism. Moreover, this formulation is contradicted by a later discussion on the distinction between ‘race’ and nation. There, in defining a ‘race’ as ‘any people who are distinguished, or consider themselves distinguished, in social relations with other peoples, by their physical characteristics’ (1970: 402, my emphasis), Cox is suggesting that racial identification can be a group *self-definition*. This is incompatible with the notion that racial identification is the ‘prerogative’ of a dominant white group in the interests of exploitation. In other words, as soon as one asserts that a group can define *itself* in relation to certain physical features, then race relations situations must extend beyond those in which an economically dominant white group defines another as racially inferior. In other words, one should not equate race relations situations with racial antagonism because it excludes, theoretically, the possibility of racial antagonism generated by whites from being challenged on its own terms and ‘reversed’. Cox’s theory is therefore unable to accommodate the phenomenon of ‘black power’.

Second, Cox’s initial dichotomous typology of ethnic systems is later

contradicted by an argument that race relations can develop into relations between nationals. This argument is advanced in two places, each taking a slightly different form to the other. In a discussion of the relationship between capitalism and race relations, he suggests that 'If the colored people themselves are able to develop a significant bourgeoisie, as among the Japanese and East Indians, race relations are further complicated by the rise of conscious nationalism' (1970: 344). Elsewhere, in a discussion on the relationship between 'race' and nation, Cox argues that an exploited 'race' becomes a subordinate nationality 'when it has gained a degree of political unity and consequently makes appeals to national importance and rights as a basis for achieving political recognition' (1970: 403). Although it is not clear from the text whether there are parallel or mutually exclusive possibilities (that is to say, it is not clear whether the development of political unity is synonymous with the emergence of a significant bourgeoisie), both assert that racial antagonism can, as a consequence of social dynamics within the subordinate 'race', develop into national antagonisms, or, in the language of the typology of ethnic systems, race relations can become nationality or minority group relations. Cox suggests that the colonized black people of Africa are potential or actual subordinate nationalities and emphasizes that their struggles as nationalities are not political class struggles because their aim is national independence and not control of the state (1970: 403).

My argument is not that the latter formulation is inadequate (although national independence must surely mean control of the state), but that if the two forms of ethnic system are not empirically discrete, as the initial presentation of the dichotomous typology suggests, then the relationship between the two should be systematically formulated at the theoretical level. Thus, given that Cox does modify this dichotomous typology to allow for the possibility that race relations can become nationality relations, should we not also allow for the possibility of nationality relations developing into race relations? Moreover, does it follow from the fact that an exploited 'race' has developed its own bourgeoisie or its own political unity that the dominant political class no longer identifies it in terms of physical features? If not, then in Cox's original terms, race relations cannot have been transformed into nationality relations because the subordinate ethnic is still identified racially. Thus, in this instance, is it the case that a race relations situation can be simultaneously a situation of nationality relations? And, if so, is it credible to postulate a theoretical dichotomy of ethnic systems? Cox's theory does not allow us to answer these questions.

Third, and following on from this point, I want to argue that the very foundation of Cox's dichotomy of ethnic systems is inadequate. The foundation lies in the proposition that ethnic systems are *either* cultural *or* racial; that is to say, when social significance is attached to cultural differentiation, we should talk of national/minority group relations, and when social significance is attached to physical differentiation, we should talk of race relations. Implicitly accepting Cox's 'slide' from an analysis of race relations to an analysis of race prejudice, this mutually exclusive dichotomy cannot cope

with the fact that many justifications for 'racial exploitation' have attributed significance to cultural and physical factors simultaneously, albeit suggesting a deterministic relationship between them. The theory of racial typology, which developed in the nineteenth century within a limited scientific community but which then informed a wider public consciousness, maintained that the world's population could not only be divided into distinct 'racial types' and ordered hierarchically, but also that these physical differences determined the cultural development of each 'race' (Banton and Harwood, 1975: 26–35).

It might be objected that this is an argument of the 1970s and was not available to Cox in the 1940s, although the objector should consider that the evidence supporting this argument (that is, the writings of Nott and Gliddon, Gobineau, etc.) was available to Cox. More telling perhaps is Cox's reference to a text which does posit a deterministic relationship between 'race' and culture, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. This asserts that 'race' is the central principle of human existence and that this is evident in the conflict between the Aryan and the Jewish 'races': the national character and culture of the Aryan 'race' has to be protected from the degradation and contamination that must follow from the mixing of Jewish blood with that of the Aryan (see, for example, Davidowicz, 1977: 44–9). In spite of his reference to *Mein Kampf* in other contexts (e.g. Cox, 1970: 156–57; 189), Cox maintains that the persecution of the Jews in Germany was based not on the attribution of inferior biological characteristics to the Jews but on the 'fact' that they were an alien people who refused to give up their own culture in favour of that of the national majority. Moreover, in an attempt to support his own thesis that race prejudice and intolerance (as exemplified by anti-semitism) are distinct phenomena, Cox quotes from a text by a Joshua Trachtenberg which, in fact, testifies to the contrary: the Jew 'is alien, not to this or that land, but to all Western society, alien in his habits, his pursuits, his interests, his character, *his very blood*' (quoted in Cox, 1970: 393, my emphasis).

Ironically, perhaps it may be easier to defend Cox's formulation in the light of certain contemporary circumstances. Wolpe, for example, has pointed out that in South Africa, there has been an ideological shift from the assertion by the white ruling class that the Africans are biologically inferior to the view that they are ethnically different, that is, they have a distinct culture and language (Wolpe, 1972: 450–51). Moreover, in the case of England, Banton and Rex agree that discrimination against New Commonwealth immigrants and their English-born children is rarely justified in terms of biological inferiority (although they differ as to how to conceptualize the alternative arguments that are used: see Banton, 1970; Rex, 1970: 136–61). On the basis of this evidence, it might seem possible to argue, within the terms of Cox's theory, that there has been a historical shift in the manner in which 'ethnics' are identified in capitalist societies, the emphasis no longer being on physical difference (which is, in turn, linked in a deterministic manner with culture) but upon cultural difference independently of physical difference. The nature of Cox's dichotomous typology of ethnic systems would then

commit one to arguing that there are no longer race relations in South Africa and England, only nationality or minority group relations.

The situation is, however, more complex. For example, although English people may not justify discrimination against black people in terms of a deterministic biological theory, they nevertheless discriminate on the basis of physical difference (see Daniel, 1968; Smith, 1977). Moreover, the argument about immigration control in Britain since the late 1950s has been, more often than not, about the control of black immigrants: hence, the exclusion of citizens of the Irish Republic from the provisions of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act and the device used in the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act to withdraw the right of Kenya Asians holding UK passports to live and work in the UK. This has now been publicly admitted by the Home Secretary who, when asked in February 1978 whether immigration control was a device to exclude 'coloured people' from Britain replied in the affirmative (*Guardian*, 6 February 1978).

In other words it is necessary to distinguish between the *act* of discrimination with respect to physical difference (in Cox's terms, race relations) and the *justification* for discrimination (in Cox's terms, race prejudice), a distinction which, as has been previously argued, Cox conflates, by default. But this distinction does not make it any easier to defend Cox's dichotomous typology of ethnic systems. This is so because, historically, it has been the case that 'ethnics' not only 'recognize each other physically and use their physical distinction as a basis of their interrelationships' (Cox, 1970: 317), but also *justify* unequal treatment (in Cox's terms, 'exploitation') by arguing that physical differentiation or biology is the basis of cultural differentiation. The more recent, historically speaking, 'unpopularity' of the latter thesis (although it is still asserted by certain academics and the National Front, amongst others) does not alter the fact that, at least in Britain, certain 'interrelationships' are based upon physical difference and that the unequal treatment of black people is justified with respect to cultural difference. It is indeed the coincidence of these two phenomena that leads Rex to argue that the concept of racism still has relevance to an analysis of 'race relations' in metropolitan countries (Rex, 1970: 136–61) and Phizacklea and the present author to argue that the concept of racism should be retained and should be conceived as the ideological element in the social process of racial categorization (Phizacklea and Miles, 1979). The significance of these distinctions in this context is that they undermine the theoretical formulation that an ethnic system based on the recognition of physical difference and an ethnic system based on the recognition of cultural differentiation are mutually exclusive and give rise to mutually exclusive types of social relations.

Conclusion: on class and 'race'

Whether Cox's analysis is to count as Marxist depends as much upon what are agreed to constitute the defining features of Marxism as upon the nature and adequacy of his analysis. In 1852, Marx wrote in a letter that he then believed

his decisive contribution had been to prove '(1) that the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular historical phases in the development of production*, (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*' (Marx and Engels, 1965: 69). These theses (which are established and asserted at some length in the *Communist Manifesto*; see Hall, 1977) are clearly evident in Cox's text, from which one might want to conclude that it can carry a Marxist label.

However, it is no longer accepted that there is a Marxist 'essence' which is to be found in all of Marx's writings, irrespective of when they were produced with the consequence that dependence upon the early works can lead to a serious misunderstanding of what constitutes a Marxist analysis (e.g. Althusser, 1969: 33–8). Hall (1977) has illustrated the importance of this point by tracing the specific breaks and advances in Marx's writings relevant to his theory of class and, in light of the fact that Cox's outline of a class is based, almost solely, upon the *Communist Manifesto* (the only other text by Marx cited by Cox is the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*), we should therefore expect to locate serious flaws in Cox's analysis when it is measured against the advances of Marx's later works. The most important absence in Cox's analysis is that of the concept of *mode of production* which 'fundamentally designates the *site of class* relations in the economic structure of capitalism, since each of those positions entails antagonistic relations — antagonisms which Marx constantly invokes in his analysis in *Capital* through the "personifications", capitalist and wage-labourer' (Hall, 1977: 54–5). Cox makes the fundamental error of asserting that a (political) class is designated by its socio-economic motivations (1970: 159) and its existence as a power group (1970: 154–55) and hence fails to locate and base classes in the process of production. Only by so doing can one understand what was for Marx the nature of exploitation under capitalism, the extraction of surplus value from the worker who possesses nothing other than labour power which is sold as a commodity (e.g. Poulantzas, 1978: 18–20). Thus, in Poulantzas' terms, Cox's analysis is one which is directly located in a problematic of agents as subjects, with social classes considered as the 'sum of the individuals of which they are composed' (Poulantzas, 1978: 178) and therefore cannot be considered to be Marxist.

It does not follow that Cox's text is without significance in relation to Marxist theory. Viewed historically it was quite self-consciously an attempt both to attack the assumptions of those who were arguing in the 1930s and 1940s that race relations in the United States were essentially caste relations, and to reassert the centrality of the concepts of class and capitalism to an understanding of the United States in particular, and Western Europe more generally. It is difficult to recall any other text of this period which at such length so emphatically attempts to reassert the relevance of these concepts. Moreover, it constitutes the first attempt by a 'Marxist' to systematically theorize a relationship between class structure and what Cox called ethnic systems, which included race relations as one instance. It is an issue

about which many Marxists have chosen to remain silent, a silence which can be sustained by attributing 'classic' status to a text which argues, amongst other things, that 'racial antagonism is essentially political-class conflict' (Cox, 1970: 333). As was initially intimated, I have shown that this assertion is an element of an internal contradiction in Cox's text and that, as a consequence, the relationship between class structure and 'ethnic systems' is ultimately unresolved. In other words, although one must recognize the importance of the text in the light of the historical context of its production, one must not automatically accept it as having solved all of the theoretical problems. The central theoretical problem remaining unresolved is, I suggest, the relationship between political class and ethnic systems, to use Cox's terms, or, as I would prefer, between the capitalist class structure and racial categories. In order to rectify Cox's error, one should be clear about its nature. I believe that the failure of Cox's attempt was due, first, to his attempt to conceptualize 'ethnic systems' independently or outside of class relations, and second, to his attempt to accord equal status to political class and national and racial ethnics as initiators of socio-economic change.

This is not the place to propose a systematic theorization of the relationship between class and racial categories within the framework of Marxist theory but the following comments are offered in the light of the preceding critique. A Marxist analysis must begin by grounding the class structure in the social formation which may include elements of more than one mode of production, but one of which will be dominant (see, for example, Laclau, 1971; Wolpe, 1972; Poulantzas, 1978: 22). The identification of classes in a social formation does not, however, refer to the multitude of social differentiation within that formation. Thus, to the extent that social significance is attributed to physical features, then there exists a process of racial categorization (see Phizacklea and Miles, 1979). But the process of racial categorization does not in any way alter the class determination (Poulantzas, 1978: 14) of either those who advance the process of categorization, or those who are the objects of the same process. Thus, in the same way that Wolpe argues that 'it in no way detracts from the conception of the state as an instrument of white domination, however, to insist that the South African state is also an instrument of class rule in a specific form of capitalist society' (Wolpe, 1972: 429), so one can assert that it does not detract from the identification of a group in a given conjuncture as being set apart and discriminated against on the basis of some physical feature to insist that that group is not outside the class structure but occupies a position of class determination. In other words, the attribution of social significance to physical features through the expression of racism and unfavourable treatment in a given social formation in no way alters the nature of the dominant mode of production and, hence, the class structure.

Thus, it follows that one of Cox's fundamental errors was to conceive political class and 'race' as *equivalent concepts*, that is, as two specific types of the same phenomenon. Within the terms of a Marxist theory, class designates a structural relationship which is independent of the consciousness of the

individuals in the social formation and which is rooted in the dominant mode of production in a given social formation whereas a racial category is a social construction which is 'nothing more' than the product of the consciousness of one or more of the respective groups. Put another way, a racial category must, by definition, presuppose phenotypical variation and the social attribution of significance to such physical difference, whereas class is a reality independent of a consciousness of class. It therefore also follows that 'race consciousness' and class consciousness are not equivalent concepts: as a social construction, 'race' presupposes the existence of a consciousness of physical difference whereas a consciousness of class presupposes both the existence of a definite mode of production of material life and a consciousness of the class forces to which it gives rise.

Although racial categorization does cut across class relations, as Cox suggests, it does so in a very specific manner. If, in a given capitalist social formation, black skin is regarded by a lighter skinned majority irrespective of class position as sufficient to confine such persons to 'second-class status', then the reproduction of socio-economic exclusion is, potentially, a motive for a political and ideological class alliance between the working class and the bourgeoisie. In other words, the production and reproduction of a racial category is one factor which has the potential of influencing class position (Poulantzas, 1978: 14–15) at the level of consciousness but it is only one factor amongst many. Whether it does so will depend upon the balance of other political and ideological forces in the given conjuncture. Racial categorization wherefore does not cut across and distort class structure, only class position in the conjuncture.

This is important in two complementary senses. If a working class and its institutions in a capitalist formation are prepared to collaborate in, or indeed to initiate, the socio-economic exclusion of a physically distinct group, along with the dominant class (or at least the controlling elements in it), then this is an issue upon which there is a political and ideological alliance between classes. But in the same way that this 'alliance' does not alter the class determination of the working class and the bourgeoisie, neither does it alter the class determination of the excluded racial category. A member of a racial category does not stand outside the structure of class determination by virtue of the social process of racial categorization (cf. Poulantzas, 1978: 15–16; 198–201). Thus, the concepts of Negro or black are, by themselves, inappropriate within Marxist discourse, yet they are the central concepts in Cox's discussion of 'the race problem in the United States' (Cox, 1970: 545–83). That discussion is characterized, in line with his preceding analysis, by a theoretical framework in which the class structure is presented as being distinct and separate from race relations, as, for example, when Cox poses the concept of ruling class whites against the concept of Negroes (e.g. Cox, 1970: 582). For a Marxist, the 'Negro' in the contemporary social formation of the USA must be conceived as being within the class structure, even if excluded from access to certain social and economic positions: the correct concept is therefore that of black working class (or, indeed, black bourgeoisie in the case of blacks who own means of production).

What then of Cox's notion of ethnic system? I have argued that it is inadequate to propose, at the level of theory, a mutually exclusive distinction between the social attribution of significance to cultural difference on the one hand and to physical difference on the other. But in so doing, it does not follow that the problem of the nature of what others call 'race' as against ethnic relations, is spirited away; indeed, neither is the question of nationalism. Much research has been conducted in this area since the 1940s and the theoretical debate has developed, to the extent that it has been argued that ethnicity should now be seen 'as the new major focus for the mobilization of interests, troublesome both to those who wish to emphasize the primacy of class, and those who wish to emphasize the primacy of nation' (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975: 18). The focus of the argument about the nature of 'race' and ethnic relations has developed to include not only the object of or motive for disassociation (physical features, culture) but also the notion of boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, thus allowing that social groups can be both subject and object of categorization (e.g. Lyon, 1972; Saifullah Khan, 1976; Wallman, 1978; Banton, 1977). The particulars of this debate are of little relevance in this context. The point to be made here is that social processes of inclusion/exclusion (based either on physical difference or cultural difference, or both) are, from the perspective of a Marxist theory, to be located in the context of a particular social formation (which, at the present time is, in turn, linked to the world system of capitalism). In a capitalist social formation the boundaries of social inclusion/exclusion are laid across the already given and qualitatively distinct class relations between bourgeoisie and proletariat but, as previously argued, do not alter their structure.

These comments do not constitute a systematic theory of the nature of and relationship between class structure, racial categorization and ethnicity. Their suggested value lies in indicating the starting point and direction in which a Marxist theory of that relationship could be developed and are offered as an alternative to what I have argued is the crude and logically inconsistent formulation of Cox. If that formulation is to be regarded as a work of Marxist scholarship (I tend to the view that it should not), then it is most certainly inadequate but, as I have attempted to indicate in the preceding paragraphs, the fault lies not in some inherent aspect of Marxism but in Cox's formulation of the concepts of political class and ethnic system. Herein there lies a double challenge to those who believe that, in demolishing Cox's analysis, they have proven that Marxist theory cannot 'cope' with race relations and to those Marxists who believe that Cox's analysis constitutes *the* Marxist analysis of an empirical epiphenomenon of the class struggle.

Notes

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1. For example, Castles and Kosack (1972: 16) refer to it in the following laudatory

manner: 'This superb work of Marxist scholarship is recommended to anyone interested in racialism'. A reviewer of Cox's last published work refers to this earlier text as 'this great work ... [which] stood alone as a Marxist analysis' (Bentley, 1978; see also Banton, 1970: 21).

2 Thus, Gabriel and Ben-Tovim (1978) are strictly speaking in error when they analyze Cox's work as an instance of a Marxist account of the 'capitalism/racism' thesis because Cox rejected racism as an analytical concept.

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